

[Jeff Waggoner]

1

Major, Lettie, PW, [Wichi?] Falls, Wichita.

No. Words 635

Page 1 [?] JEFF WAGGONER—COWBOY

“When I think of those days as a cowboy on the range I get real lonesome. I was born in Wise County, and lived there until I was eighteen years old.

“On June 10, 1879, I passed through the unsettled townsite of Wichita Falls and joined the outfit of W. T. Waggoner, three miles from Wichita Falls.

“For seven years I rode the plains, living in a dugout in the winters, and spending the spring and summer on the range. They sent out provisions from headquarters about twice during the winter. We killed beef once in a while, and got by till spring.

“In the spring usually April three neighboring ranches of Worsham, Burnett and Waggoner started south to gather up the cattle. You see, they drift south during the winter. As the whole region was unfenced, it took considerable scouting before the round up was over. There were about twenty outfits. In each outfit, was a cook (who besides cooking drove the supply wagon), a horse wrangler who drove the extra horses, and eighteen or twenty cowboys. Each cowboy head to furnish his own saddle, but board was furnished and a small sum of money besides.

“During the day the boys herded the cattle. At night they watched in relays. Some times they sat around the camp fire and listened to one of them playing the fiddle. Sometimes they all sang the cowboy songs. This had a twofold purpose. It made the boys feel better

Library of Congress

and was soothing to the cows. You see, if cows get nervous or startled they start a stampede, and that is something to reckon with.

“To relieve the [nonotary?], the boys played poker. When we came to a town we tried to stir up a dance. 2 “We would send out word to headquarters when we had some fifteen hundred head of cattle rounded up. Then the three ranches would send out men to bring their own brand home. The rest of us would stay to finish the round up.

“Some of the boys I knew traded a dressed beef for a town lot in Wichita Falls, but I was not interested in any such trade. I did not care to burden myself with city property. I wanted to be free to go and come as I chose.

“I enjoyed the trips to Kansas City. There were eight cowboys, a boss, a cook and a horse wrangler in the expedition. The boss traveled ahead and located water and a camp site. Then the wagon driver stopped at the place and made camp. We boys drove the cattle till they got to the wagon. We made about twenty miles a day.

“It usually took about two months to reach Kansas City. We would let the cattle graze along the green pastures. We wanted them to get fat for market. Every bit of grass they ate, was eaten while traveling along. We would let them lie down and rest while we ate. We would not let them rest long, or they would be restless at night.

“The first night out there was a stampede on [Oashe?] Creek. We did not know the cause. About five hundred cattle were lost. It delayed the trip two days before we found them all.

“The boss wrote W. T. Waggoner about the time the cattle were due to arrive. So he went by train to make arrangements for the sale.

“On one of our trips, we found that the cattle were too poor for market. They had to be pastured for two or three months. They had nearly run themselves to death as far as North Canadian, stampeding every night. We were in the long grass, and the wind blowing

Library of Congress

through the grass would startle one of them. 3 One of them, jumping up or even snorting, would scare the bunch and away they would go.

“About the wisest thing ever did was when I married Mary Cose of Decatur, February 23, 1888. I settled down then, on the twenty thousand acre tract that W. T. Waggoner had fenced in on Gilbert Creek.

“I looked after two thousand cattle for nine years. I accumulated quite a stock in that time, so I decided to lease the pasture. My brother, John J., went in with me on the seven year lease. He lived in Iowa Park during that time. We later bought an eight thousand acre ranch on Beaver Creek. I turned over my interest to my oldest son, Merle.

“We moved to Wichita Falls in 1905. We wanted our children to have educational advantages.